

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DHA-02 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15

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FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3668

INFO AMEMBASSY TOKYO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 3691

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM PINT KS

SUBJ: FIRST SESSIONS IN CHURCH-STATE DIALOGUE

REF: SEOUL 3551

1. PRIME MINISTER CHOE KYU-HA, RANKING OFFICIALS OF MINISTRIES OF INTERIOR AND INFORMATION AND CULTURE, AND KEY OFFICIALS OF KCIA MET WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF CATHOLIC BISHIOPS CONFERENCE ON APRIL 28 AND WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF PROTESTANT COMMUNITY ON APRIL 29. CATHOLICS HAD REQUESTED DIALOGUE WITH ROKG, BUT ROKG EVIDENTLY TOOK INITIATIVE IN CALLING FOR PARALLEL TALKS WITH PROTESTANTS.

2. CHURCH SOURCES REPORT THAT AT BOTH MEETINGS CHURCH SIDE TALKED ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS, AND GOVERNMENT TALKED ABOUT NATIONAL SECURITY. ON THE OTHER HAND, CHURCH LEADERS FELT ROKG SIDE ACKNOWLEDGED AT LEAST TO SOME EXTENT THAT RESTRICTIONS ON HUMAN RIGHTS POSED PROBLEMS WORTH DISCUSSING. KCIA HAD SUGGESTED THAT PROTESTANTS ASK PRIME MINISTER TO HOLD REGULAR MEETINGS IN FUTURE, BUT CHURCHMEN HAD DECIDED BEFORE FIRST MEETING THAT THEY WOULD NOT (RPT NOT) ASK FOR MORE. AT END OF FIRST MEETING, PRIME MINISTER PROPOSED FURTHER DIALOGUE, AND CHURCHMEN ACCEPTED, APPARENTLY BECAUSE OF THEIR FAVORABLE IMPRESSION OF EXPERIENCE.
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3. PARTICIPATION BY CATHOLICS PARTICULARLY NOTEWORTHY, FOR IT IS FIRST TIME CHURCH AS AN INSTITUTION HAS RAISED HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE IN GENERAL TERMS WITH ROKG. IN PAST, BISHOPS CONFERENCE HAD BEEN TOO DIVIDED TO ADDRESS ISSUE COHERENTLY. CARDINAL KIM SUCCEEDED IN CONVINGING BISHOPS BY POINTING TO DIVISIVE STRAINS HUMANRIGHTS

CONTROVERSY WAS CAUSING IN CHURCH. HE SAID HE AGREED PRESIDENT PARK HAD DONE GOOD JOB FOR COUNTRY, BUT POINTED OUT THAT SOME MODICUM OF DEMOCRACY WAS NECESSARY TO PROVIDE SVOTH TRANSITION IN EVENT OF PARK'S DEATH OR INCAPACITATION. BISHOPS CONFERENCE AGREED TO APPROACH ROKG BUT INSISTED THAT DELEGATION AVOID ANTAGONISTIC POSE. TWO BISHOPS KNOWN TO BE WELL DISPOSED TO ROKG WERE ASSIGNED TO DELEGATION ALONG WITH CARDINAL KIM.

4. CATHOLICS SEE DIALOGUE AS AN OPENING TO PROCESS WHICH MUST EVENTUALLY INVOLVE PRESIDENT PARK, WHO IS THE ONLY PERSON THEY BELIEVE CAPABLE OF AFFECTING POLICY. WHILE CATHOLICS ARE ADOPTING GUISE OF FRIENDLY COUNSELORS, PROTESTANTS ARE CLOSER TO ROLE OF WARY ADVSERSARIES VIS-A-VIS ROKG. PROTESTANTS, HOWEVER, SEEM SATISFIED AND INDEED IMPRESSED WITH LEVEL OF ROKG REPRESENTATON. CHURCHMEN, CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT ALIKE, ARE AWARE THAT ROKG MIGHT USE DIALOGUE AS PLOY TO GIVE FALSE ILLUSION OF PROGRESS ON HUMAN RIGHTS TO WORLD. NEITHER CATHOLICS NOR PROTESTANTS, HOWEVER, ARE IN ANY MOOD TO SUSTAIN DIALOGUE IF IT BECOMES APPARENT THAT ROKG IS ACTING IN BAD FAITH OR IF TALKS BECOME STERILE EXERCISE.
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